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SENSITIVE
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SUBJECT: (SBU) HEDEGAARD TO EU COMMISSION AFTER COP-15; SUCCESSOR
LIKELY TO DEFER, THEN FOLLOW EXAMPLE

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(U) SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED--NOT FOR INTERNET DISTRIBUTION.

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Danish Prime Minister Rasmussen on November 24 named Connie Hedegaard as Denmark's EU Commissioner; she is expected to get the climate portfolio. He named Copenhagen University Vice-rector Lykke Friis as Hedegaard's replacement as Minister of Climate and Energy. Hedegaard will retain her role and cabinet rank for the upcoming climate conference (COP-15)--Rasmussen named her "Minister for the UN's Climate Conference in Copenhagen"--through the end of the conference. Friis is known as an EU expert but is a relative newcomer to politics. She is well known to the Embassy and expected to continue Hedegaard's efforts to promote PM Rasmussen's proposed political deal at COP-15 and to continue Hedegaard's activist role in international negotiations after Hedegaard's departure for Brussels. The cabinet change is seen as strengthening Rasmussen's governing Liberal Party, at the expense of Hedegaard's Conservative Party, who will lose a high-profile figure popular with voters to Brussels. Driven by internal EU politics, the Hedegaard-Friis shift is unlikely to affect Denmark's continued advocacy of a comprehensive politically-binding climate agreement in Copenhagen. End Summary.

REACTION POSITIVE

¶2. (U) Social Democratic opposition leader Helle Thorning-Schmidt praised Friis for her personal qualities but charged that she might not fit in the governing coalition. "I doubt whether Lykke Friis will be able to accept that generally, it's the Danish People's Party that has the final say on most issues. And at the heart of the Liberal Party there are still many who believe that all this speculation about the climate is pure nonsense," she said. Pia Kjaersgaard, leader of the Danish People's Party on which the ruling coalition depends, urged PM Rasmussen to make more dramatic cabinet changes to refresh the governing coalition. She said: "This government is looking very tired and it would freshen things up if the PM's New Year speech contained some new initiatives and new ministers." Kjaersgaard added: "The government knows it's worn out and that's why they had to bring in an outsider, Ms. Friis, to the climate ministry. I find that incredible."

¶3. (U) Biographic Information: Lykke Friis (dob 10/27/69) became vice rector of Copenhagen University in 2006. While new to electoral politics (reportedly joining the Liberal Party just days before being named minister), Friis is a recognized expert on political and EU affairs. The politics of the EU has been her main academic and professional field of interest. She earned a Master's Degree from the London School of Economics in 1992, and in 1994 was a Robert Schuman Scholar at the European Parliament. In 1997 she earned her doctorate from the University of Copenhagen, in Political Science. Friis served as Director of European Affairs (2003-06) for the Danish Confederation of Industries. From 1996-2002 she served in different capacities at the Danish Institute of International

Affairs, a government-supported think tank.

¶4. (U) Friis' recent book, called "Oysters at Kampinski," was her fifth about Europe and the EU. She has lectured at various Danish universities, writes a column in two leading Danish newspapers, and is a frequent political commentator on Danish radio and television. She has participated on various Danish honorary boards, including the government's Climate Commission from 2007-2009, and has won various awards. Friis has been a member of the Trilateral Commission since 2004 and was named in 1999-2000 as Denmark's representative to the Nordic "Wise Men" Grouping.

¶5. (SBU) Friis is highly dynamic, outgoing, and loves to use humor in her public presentations. Friis' family background is German. She is married but has no children. She visited the U.S. on a group IVLP on U.S. Foreign Policy in the fall of 1999, and won an Eisenhower fellowship in 2002. Friis has been active with the Embassy, attending Embassy functions and serving as an advisor on a number of Embassy programs, including minority issues and the Fulbright Commission.

COMMENT

¶6. (SBU) Thus far, Hedegaard's future EU assignment has not had any discernable impact on her advocacy of Denmark's pragmatic push for a political agreement at COP-15, and she has publicly affirmed that she will represent Denmark's interest as host nation until she takes up her new assignment in Brussels. We are told by her aides not to expect any shift before COP-15 ends.

¶7. (SBU) For her part, Friis is likely to defer to Rasmussen and Hedegaard's leadership during COP-15, and then vigorously promote Rasmussen's vision after Hedegaard leaves to take up her post in Brussels. Hedegaard's advisors tell us she and Friis do not know

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each other well, but that Friis is expected to avoid pushing any national position that would complicate matters for the COP-15 chair (initially Hedegaard, followed by Rasmussen during the high level segment Dec 16-19). The analogy they draw is to the norm for EU nations occupying the EU presidency.

¶8. (SBU) After COP-15 ends and Hedegaard departs for Brussels, we expect Friis to assume a greater role in Danish climate policy-making, following Hedegaard's example of vigorous pursuit of international negotiations toward a legally binding climate agreement.

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